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REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Letter dated 14 November 1994 from the Permanent Representative of Yugoslavia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the report of the Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on the problems of population development in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 158.

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ANNEX

1. For years Yugoslavia used to be an active participant in the work of numerous international organizations and gatherings devoted to population issues as well as in the formulation and implementation of pertinent international documents, including the Bucharest and Mexico Plans of Actior. In this context, it always advocated the broadest possible approach to population development, not only from the standpoint of the promotion of the right to a free choice in the number and spacing of children and the development of family planning programmes, but also from the aspect of the need to promote overall economic and social development in view of its close interaction with population development. The new dimension of the approach to these relations imposed by the limited extent of natural resources, which was highlighted particularly in the preparations for the International Conference on Population and Development, held at Cairo in September 1994, gave rise to expectations that that gathering would articulate a new approach to future population development, which, provided the necessary and adequate international cooperation was forthcoming, would be implemented both globally and regionally and nationally, tailored to respective specificities.

2. Having been precluded from participating in the Cairo Conference, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was denied the right to support such an approach, but equally to draw the attention of such an important gathering to the gravity of the current situation and of the expected consequences of the severe limitations on the development of its population entailed by the tragic events in the area of the former Yugoslavia and by the unjustly imposed sanctions of the international community.

3. The national reports which the Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia submitted for both this Conference and the European Regional Conference - to which its official delegation was also denied attendance - clearly indicate that the consequences of those events and of the rigorous application of the sanctions severely afflict all fields the earlier development of which is behind the positive changes in population development which had brought the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia quite close to European standards, albeit with still pronounced regional differences.

4. Today the entire population of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the refugees from the republics of the former Yugoslavia which it has taken in suffer the consequences of the drastic deterioration of economic trends synthetically expressed in the decline of the gross national product (GNP), which, according to estimates for 1993, has been reduced to somewhat over US$ 1,100 per capita annually. This has, in turn, been strongly reflected in a decline in the living standards and severely eroded the functioning of, in particular, the health system, but also of the educational and social welfare systems which play a crucial role in the pursuit of population policies. The introduction of the Security Council sanctions is a drastic example of how the political decisions of the international community can contribute to the extreme exacerbation of the economic and social conditions of population development, difficult as they may be already, and thereby jeopardize the future of an entire nation living in the heart of developed Europe.

5. The population of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which, according to the last census in 1991, numbered 10.41 million, was determined by low growth rates and a downward tendency over a protracted period (1971-1981: 9.1 per thousand; 1981-1991: 6.6 per thousand; 1991: only 4.9 per thousand) and the influence of migrations which were positive until the last decade (0.7 per thousand), to become negative in the period 1981-1991 (-1.7 per thousand).

6. The low population growth rate would not be unsatisfactory observed at the level of the whole country were it not for the marked regional differences hidden behind it. On the one hand, a steadily falling number of births and unsatisfactory fertility (on the very verge of or below the reproduction threshold) characterize the largest part of the country, which, coupled with ageing, especially of the female and non-urban population segments, and the relatively high mortality rates, result in the spreading of the area of low and even negative growth rates within Central Serbia and the province of Vojvodina and towards the Republic of Montenegro. On the other hand there are areas, notably the province of Kosovo and Metohija within the framework of the Republic of Serbia, where, notwithstanding established downward tendencies, high birth rates are still being registered, which, compounded by the high share of young people in the population pattern and low mortality rates, results in high population growth.

7. In earlier years, numerous measures of population and other relevant policies were employed to address the economic and social implications normally entailed by so uneven a population volume, pattern and distribution. Today, weighed down by the problems with which it is confronted in the economic, social and every other domain, aggravated to the maximum by the sanctions of the international community, not only is it extremely difficult for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to implement such measures, but its overall population is exposed to the hazards of retrograde tendencies evident in factors influencing both natural and mechanical population movements.

8. The devastating effect of the sanctions is especially in evidence in the functioning of the health system. The enormous difficulties it is facing have already been strongly manifested in the reduced extent and quality of health care, which, together with the rapid and severe decline in the living standards, have resulted in the deteriorated health status of the population, with heightened pathology, morbidity and mortality.

9. Under such circumstances, the Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has adopted a special strategy and measures for the provision of health care, according absolute priority, apart from to the elderly, urgent cases and infectious diseases, also to children and adolescents under 18, and women during pregnancy, childbirth and a year after parturition. Even where these categories of the population are concerned, the health system is necessarily predominantly curative, with some exceptionally significant preventive activities, such as routine check-ups of infants, pre-school and schoolchildren, pregnant women and women of generative age, having been reduced by as much as 30 per cent.

10. The consequences are evident. The steady downward infant mortality trend registered in the past has been reversed; there is an increasing number of pregnancies and childbirths attended by complications, professionally unattended deliveries, and prematurely born babies.

11. The renewed incidence is registered of a number of once eradicated contagious diseases among both children and adults. Chronic non-contagious diseases, typical of the pathology of developed countries, are on the rise among adults, but so are diseases and phenomena which arise as a consequence of existential deprivation caused by the severe erosion of the financial and social standing of the population, such as mental disorders, accidents and injuries, and suicides. There is an increasing number of miscarriages and cases of sterility.

12. All this, coupled with the decline in the living standards, high unemployment and the formidable obstacles to the operation of welfare and child-care institutions and social transfers as well as of the educational system, has adversely affected the state of the population in general and its reproductive behaviour in particular.

13. At the same time, the exceptionally difficult circumstances in which the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia lives have given rise to a new dimension in terms of the effects of the mechanical movement of the population on the current situation and its future growth. In addition to traditional internal migrations, primarily featuring the concentration of the population in cities and the evacuation of rural areas, new migrations are also changing the demographic map of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In recent years, these have involved hundreds of thousands of refugees from the republics of the former Yugoslavia, with an exceptionally vulnerable composition dominated by children, women, the elderly and the sick, whose care is the obligation of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia until conditions are created for those who are able to do so to return to their earlier places of residence.

14. On the other hand, external-bound migrations of the population of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia towards European and overseas countries have intensified of late. These are the direct consequence of the present difficulties in the economic and social fields, which have, inter alia, made it impossible to complete initiated programmes in the areas of industry, agriculture, tourism and other activities which offered the people realistic prospects if, rather than migrate, they remained in or returned to certain regions featuring extensive evacuation.

15. The fact that these migrations include predominantly the economically active and fertile population segments, with a large share being highly educated, makes them all the more worrisome. Although the actual proportions of this phenomenon have not been precisely quantified, observed over the long term it may well have negative implications for the demographic development of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, especially if it goes on for some time to come or if the people leave for good.

16. The demographic problems referred to and their potential consequences determine the common framework, directions and plan of action of the country's

population policy. The objective of this plan of action, which the Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia presented in its report for the Cairo Conference, is first and foremost to introduce measures to overcome the current unfavourable state of affairs and then fall in line with other countries in an effort to ensure for the future a uniform and moderate population growth, compatible with sustainable development but equally with the right to childbirth as a universally accepted basic human right.

17. In pursuing the goals set, the plan of action envisages, inter alia, the continued implementation of measures designed to rid reproduction of both atavistic and modern pressures in order to reduce excessive and increase insufficient natality to converge around the replacement level. Closely associated with this goal is the further promotion of the status of women in the family and society and the development of relevant family and child help services. This involves the further advancement of the general and health education levels, the promotion of the overall health condition of the population and the reduction of morbidity and mortality, in particular of infants, young children and other vulnerable categories. The plan of action also stresses the need to undertake measures to facilitate the return of refugees to their homes, or, if this should prove to be unfeasible, their integration in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, as well as measures for the return and reintegration of young people who have left the country.

18. It is quite certain that the essential prerequisite for implementing the measures envisaged in the plan is the normalization of conditions for the implementation of economic and social development and environmental protection programmes.

19. Initial results towards the normalization of these conditions have been achieved by the implementation of the Programme of Reconstruction of the Monetary System and Strategy of Economic Recovery of Yugoslavia. However, its potential for contributing substantially to the removal of the difficulties and problems with which the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is confronted, despite the broadest consensus upon which it rests, will be considerably constrained unless the very near future brings the lifting of the sanctions, by the unjustified introduction of which the international community is punishing an entire nation and denying it the right to consolidate its past gains and adapt itself to the changing conditions of life on Earth ushered in by the twenty-first century.